

A Study of Murder in the Cathedral as a Poetic Drama

The History of Modern Poetic Drama

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Abstract:

This study purports to enquire about the poetic drama from the twentieth century which describes the *Murder in the Cathedral*. The deteriorating naturalistic prose plays of Ibsen, Shaw and Galsworthy paved way to the rise of English poetic drama in the twentieth century. Its photographic realism failed to convey the tension and complexity of contemporary life. Stephen Phillips' *Herod* (1901) led to the revival of poetic drama followed by great Irish writers like Yeats, Synge and O'Casey. It also focuses on Eliot's views on poetic drama and he reiterates that the greatest drama is poetic drama and poetic excellence can compensate for dramatic defects. This study also deals with a brief historical background of the play with special mention about its theme, the role of the chorus and as a poetic drama.

Keywords: poetic drama, martyrdom, chorus, tragic hero

It was through the medium of prose that the Elizabethans wrote plays by mixing convention and naturalism, prose and verse. The dominance of poetry went unchanged until the 18th century. Since 18th century was primarily the age of prose, Goldsmith and Sheridan failed to realise the importance of verse as a medium of drama. Attempts were made by Byron, Shelley, Tennyson and Browning but they also failed because they were poets and not dramatists.

From 1860 onwards, drama became the vehicle of social criticism and propaganda. Ibsen, Pinero, Shaw, Galsworthy and Barker were the chief exponents of the realistic and intellectual drama, popularly known as Naturalistic Drama. There were various reasons why they were not attracted by poetic drama. The naturalistic dramatists wanted to produce the illusion of reality choosing everyday contemporary situations and everyday ordinary characters. They therefore rejected the older convention of dramatic speech.

In the last decade of the 19th century, a reaction against the naturalistic tendencies of surface reality began in England as well as in Europe. The new generation wished to use drama as a serious literary form. The leaders of Irish Literary Revival, W .B. Yeats, Lady Gregory and

J.M. Synge established the Abbey Theatre in Dublin to encourage the poet-playwrights. Later on, the plays of W.H. Auden, Christopher Isherwood, Stephen Spender, and John Masefield strengthened the cause of poetic drama. They tried to bring poetry back to the theatre but they failed because they knew too little of the stage or play construction or dialogue. However the revivers of poetic drama held a significant place and their contribution is very significant.

J. M. Synge tried to restore new artistic vitality to Modern English Drama. He wrote in prose but his work led to the development of poetic drama. Synge asserted that all great drama tends towards poetry because in the final analysis only poetic speech can reveal character. And for real and living poetry, the dramatist should go to life and extract the resources of poetry and imagination that are found in the speech of the common people. He succeeded in achieving both the richness of language and comprehensive realities in his plays. His dramas in fact are poetic dramas in prose. His *Riders to the Sea* is remarkable for the use of highly suggestive and imaginative language.

W. B. Yeats wrote 26 plays. His work of the Abbey Theatre gave him a deep knowledge of theatrical technique and also ideas to work with *The Resurrection* and *On Baile's Strand* which are among the finest plays in which the rhythms and images of the poetic dialogue achieve a remarkable concentration of meaning. Yeats's entirely new approach to drama encouraged those who were seeking to bring poetry into drama.

W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood wrote verse plays among which *The Dance of Death*, *The dog beneath the skin* and *On the Frontier* are the most important. Stephen Spender, John Drinkwater, John Masefield are the other dramatists who enriched the field of poetic drama. Eliot and Christopher Fry are the two most significant personalities and they have become the centre of attention and attraction among the critics. Fry's first play *The Boy with a Cart* is a mixture of poetry and prose. *A Phoenix too Frequent* is Fry's first comedy and the other plays are *The Lady's Not for Burning* and *The Dark is Light Enough*. But T. S. Eliot's contribution to poetic drama is of immense value. Eliot has explored the drama of the Elizabethans and ancients and has put into it a new sense of renaissance, wonder and greatness. His five plays are landmarked in the history of poetic drama- '*Murder in the Cathedral*', *The Family Reunion*, *The Cocktail Party*, *Confidential Clerk* and *The Elderly Statesman*. '*Murder in the Cathedral*' is Eliot's first complete poetic drama. Here, he turned to Christian ritual and used many novel devices. There is a choric speech chanted by a group of characters; words and phrases are repeated in order to build up the atmosphere of the play. The high spirituality of '*Murder in the Cathedral*', its blending of mysticism with realistic humour, its varying measure, equally fit for dialogue or for flights of lyrical sublimity made it one of the noblest experiments in poetic drama. *The Family Reunion* is a grim story of crime, remorse and purification. *The Cocktail Party* and *The Confidential Clerk* are comedies of technical brilliance and beautiful dialogue.

Eliot's Theory of Poetic Drama

Eliot's views on poetic drama are valuable and significant. Eliot says that form is essential to the success of poetic drama. The form in modern drama can be either prose or verse. The notion that verse is an artificial medium and that it limits emotional range and realistic truth is

wrong. Verse is the medium of the permanent, while prose merely deals with the universal and superficial. It is wrong to condemn the Elizabethan dramatists for mixing poetry and drama. Verse and drama are not separate entities but are fused together in a really critic work. The moments of dramatic tension poetry becomes dramatic. Eliot says that the poetic and dramatic patterns are indistinguishable. The greatest drama is poetic drama and poetic excellence can compensate for dramatic defects. Shakespeare's plays have the complete fusion of the two. His finest poetry is to be found in his most dramatic scenes.

What the Elizabethans and Jacobean dramatists lacked was suitable dramatic conventions and the very drawback, affects the development of poetic drama in the modern age. Eliot observes that it is a mistake to feel that the nation already having a great period of English drama in the Elizabethan era cannot expect another such period of greatness. It has failed to revive so far, because attempts have been made by poets lacking knowledge of the stage or by those who knew the stage and were not poets.

Suitable dramatic conventions have to be evolved for poetic drama. The dramatic convention of the three unities is useful as it leads to concentration and intensity. Greek drama was superior because of the conventions.

Eliot in his 'Rhetoric and Poetic Drama' says that rhetoric used artistically and dramatically has a significant place in poetic drama. Successful poetic drama implies careful selection of only typical and universal human emotions and giving them artistic forms. Poetic sense and dramatic perception must be fused and language suitably varied according to feeling and action.

In his lecture delivered in 1950, Eliot says that the use of verse in drama is objected to on the basis of being artificial. But prose spoken by the character on stage is equally far removed from ordinary speech. So Eliot says that verse should be flexible enough to accommodate every situation and every scene. Verse should be used throughout so that the effect of the verse rhythm can be enjoyed without consciously doing so. Moreover dramatic verse can be used to say the most matter of fact things but problem of communication is very urgent. In poetic drama the artist has to practice great self-control, always keeping in mind the laws of dramatic effectiveness.

The subject of Eliot's first play '*Murder in the Cathedral*' is from a very remote period of history and verse is acceptable for it. But for a remote subject he should not use modern vocabulary nor could he make it archaic as he sought to emphasise the theme's contemporary significance. So he made use of a neutral style neither of the present nor of the past. Instead of following Shakespeare's blank verse, he kept in mind the versification of '*Every Man*'.

Historical Background of the Play

T.S. Eliot's '*Murder in the Cathedral*' is the story of the murder of Thomas Beckett, the Archbishop of Canterbury. According to Winston Churchill, 'no episode opens to use a wilder window upon the politics of the 12th century in England than the quarrel of Henry-II

with his great subject and former friend, Thomas Beckett. This conflict was not confined to England. It was the root question of the European world as it then existed.

A few months after the coronation of Henry II, his sometimes servant was raised to chancellorship in 1155. The chancellor's position was a great one and he was the first subject in the kingdom. He controlled the ecclesiastical patronage of the crown. The king and the chancellor became inseparable friends. The king wanted to bring radical changes in the state; he also wanted to raise the standard of the crown, higher than that of the pope. During this time, Theobald the archbishop died. The king elected Thomas as Archbishop as he anticipated that Beckett would gladly sacrifice the church to the interest of the king. From the moment all his gifts and impulses ran in another channel. After a tour on the continent and a conclave with the religious dignitaries of France and Italy, he returned to England imbued with the resolve to establish the independence of the church. A dispute between Henry and Beckett began. Their dispute on various issues broadened into a controversy between the spiritual and temporal authorities. Thomas Beckett went into exile in France and came back in December 1170 after an interval of seven years. On December 29, 1170, he was murdered by four knights. The murder of one of the foremost of God's servants struck at the heart of the age. All England was filled with terror and they acclaimed the dead Archbishop as a martyr.

Theme:

According to D.E. Jones, '*Murder in the Cathedral*' is not just a dramatization of the death of Thomas Beckett, it is a deep searching study of the significance of martyrdom. There is no attempt at naturalism or the creation of illusion. Historical detail is severely subordinated to the design of martyrdom which gives the play its shape as well as its meaning. Part 1 portrays temptations, first the temptation is to compromise and avoid martyrdom, and then the temptation is to accept it in the wrong spirit. 'To do the right deed for the wrong reason'. Thomas acknowledges the hard won knowledge that, as he says in the sermon, the true martyr is he who has become the instrument of god and who no longer desires anything for himself not even the glory of being a martyr. The sermon follows as an Interlude between the two parts giving expression to the self-knowledge that Beckett has gained in part 2 and showing him beginning to make perfect his will, in readiness for the action of part 2.

The second half of the play is concerned largely with the second half of the pattern of martyrdom, with and through the chorus. We, the audience are invited to participate in the celebration of the act of martyrdom and to accept the sacrifice of Thomas as made on our behalf. The benefit we acknowledge is spiritual rather than political and it comes from Thomas's suffering rather than their action. For us, therefore, the play is not over; the effect of Thomas's sacrifice continues. The priest enters and helps us to recover the mood of the martyrdom in a chastened form.

The play begins with a song of the chorus consisting of the women of Canterbury. The song of the chorus is the voice of Eliot's frustration after the 1st world war. The attitude of the poet of '*The wasteland*' still continues. He finds no difference between the life of the women in

the 12th century and that of the 20th century. They are still oppressed and politically tortured and almost spiritually paralysed. They suffer a lot under the feudal lords.

The women say that they have assembled near the cathedral to witness something horrible. It means that they are compelled to witness the murder of the Archbishop who is coming to England after 7 years from France. They understand it in a prophetic vision. They sing about the changes of season which is a symbol of endless cycle of time. The ruin in winter is correlated to the doom of the church, the archbishop and the whole country. The New Year and Destiny are personified as a man who is bewildered and terribly frustrated. It is a beautiful illustration of pathetic fallacy. Eliot has succeeded in creating an atmosphere of frustration, an atmosphere conducive to the tragic death of Thomas Beckett. The chorus concludes its first song with a faith that destiny always waits in the hands of God and not in the hands of patriarchs. The song of the chorus strikes the keynote of the catastrophe of the plot-the murder of Beckett.

The Role of the Chorus

Critics are unanimous in raising Eliot's use of the chorus in '*Murder in the Cathedral*'. He restores the full throated chorus at the ancient Greek tragedy after years of neglect and he has been tremendously successful in his efforts. In 'Aeschylus', the chorus remains central to the action and it is the principal means of transcending the limitations of drama. Sophocles transfers attention to the individual actor and makes the chorus subordinate to him. Although Euripides occasionally brings the chorus back towards the centre of physical action he does nothing to restore its centrality of function. However the form of the chorus that Eliot adapted in '*Murder in the Cathedral*' is not that of Sophocles but that of Aeschylus.

D.E. Jones observes that like a Greek tragedy, the classical rather than the Elizabethan tradition, '*Murder in the Cathedral*' opens with a chorus that of the women of Canterbury and it presents a commentary on the action, sublime the action with a background that is all pervasive. About the use of the chorus in the play, Eliot himself says, 'in making use of the chorus, we do not aim to copy Greek drama'. There is a good deal about the Greek theatre that we do not know and never shall not. But the chorus has always fundamentally the same use. It mediates between the action and the audience, it intensifies the action by projecting its emotional consequence, so that, we, as the audience see it doubly by seeing its effect on other people'. Eliot has in fact gone back to the fountain head of European drama and restored the Aeschylean form. He has used the chorus to open out the action into its full significance as nobody else has done since Aeschylus.

But Eliot has not just copied Aeschylus, he has given the chorus a new significance in the light of the Christian disposition. In '*Murder in the Cathedral*', the chorus is much further individualised. This is due less perhaps to the influence of naturalism and the modern emphasis on individuality than to the implication of Christianity with its simultaneous emphasis on the precious uniqueness of the individual and the importance of spiritual community. The chorus represents in effect the greatness of individuals which Christ came to see. The martyrdom of Beckett is likewise on their behalf. The chorus embody their experience rather than the authors view of the action. Of course they speak with the fullness

of utterance not with the limited idiom of real ‘scrubbers and sweepers’. They are giving expression to communal feeling which usually runs deeper than individual feeling. David E. Jones remarks ‘there is nothing else like them in English to my knowledge, in fact, it seems to me that we have to go back to Greek tragedy to find choral writing with which to compare the best of them.’

Eliot himself accounts for the reason why he has used the chorus in the play. He wants to concentrate on death and martyrdom. The introduction of a chorus of excited women, reflecting in their emotion the significance of the action helps wonderfully. A poet writing for the first time for the stage is much more at home in choral verse than in dramatic dialogue. And the dramatic weakness will be somewhat covered up by the cries of the women. Eliot pictures the women as rooted in rituals of toil-rituals of the seasons sharing the dignity of their domestic and agricultural labour. His picture of the people may not be historically exact but it is imaginatively moving’. He is able to visualize the lies within the contest of values and conflicts which the play is about. They are capable of commenting on the action which they first obscurely and later luminously understand. In the magnificent series of chorus just before the murder of the archbishop, Eliot through these voices of the past focusses his feelings of horror in a universal vision which include the present as well as the past.

It is worthy to be noticed that the women of the chorus grow and evolve in their character in the course of the play. According to William V. Spanos, they impress in their final chorus, their acceptance of the martyrdom of Thomas and its efficacy. After the murder of Beckett the women realize that they share the blame of the murder by their passive consent to the deed. From rejection and hostility they move to acceptance and resignation. They recognize Thomas to be a saint and invoke his spirit to pray for them.

The chorus acts as foreteller of the future action. The women have a strong premonition of impending evil. The chorus develops the action of the action. It develops the plot, keeps its continuity and knits various actions into one composite fibre. ‘Some of the greatest poetry of the play lies in the chorus’ says Helen Gardener ‘the real drama of the play is to be found in the chorus’. Again Gardener says that the fluctuation of the chorus is the true measure of Thomas’s spiritual conquest. To D. E. Jones, they are worshippers at a shrine, the pilgrims to Canterbury the Christian equivalent of the ritual mourners weeping for the dead god or hero. As Gareth Lloyd Evans says ‘this chorus sets the scenes for us, and is able, verbally to take us on a visual journey to those areas which it is necessary that we should see in our imaginative eye’. Through the chorus, we see Canterbury outside the cathedral, we experience the seasons, we watch peasant, king and priests at work and at talk and we see even great ceremonies.

Martyrdom as the Theme of the Play

Eliot’s writings is always tinged with a sense of disillusionment and it is conspicuous in poems like ‘The Wasteland’ and ‘Hollow men’. The themes of his plays are but an extension of the themes of his poetry and it is especially obvious in ‘*Murder in the Cathedral*’. The martyrdom of Beckett is an apt choice for the Canterbury play. The theme of the conflict of the spiritual and secular powers, the relation of church and state is a subject on which Eliot

has spoken much in prose. But the conflict of church and state is subordinated to another theme and the personal relationship Eliot deliberately avoids. The king does not appear and the knights are not persons but a set of attitudes. They murder for an idea or for various ideas and are not shown as individuals disturbed by personal passions and personal motives. Eliot's chief concern is with the martyrdom and Beckett's struggle to sainthood. As D. E. Jones says, the play is not just a dramatization of Beckett's death, it is a deep searching study of the significance of martyrdom.

The central theme of the play is martyrdom, in its strict and ancient sense. For the martyr means witness, we are not to think of martyr as primarily one who suffers for a cause or who gives up his life for truth, but as a witness to the awful reality of the supernatural. The actual deed by which Thomas is struck down is in a sense unimportant. It is not important as a dramatic climax towards which all that has happened leads. We are warned again and again that we are not watching a sequence of events that has the normal dramatic logic of motive, art, result but an action which depends on the will of god and not on the will of man. Thomas can hardly be said to be tempted for the play opens so near its climax that any inner development is impossible.

Except for the last, the tempters are hardly more than recapitulations of what has now ceased to tempt. Helen Gardener says, 'the last temptation is so subtle and interior that no audience or judge whether it is truly overcome or not what spiritual pride lurks in a martyr's heart even in his last agony is not to be measured by the most suitable and scrupulous self-analyst for less by any bystander'. Though Thomas may say, 'now is my way clear, now is the meaning plain, Temptation shall not come in this kind again' a question has been raised at and cannot be answered dramatically and that has simply to be set aside we have to take it for granted that Thomas dies with a pure will. If in the 1st part the strife is with shadows, in the 2nd, there is no strife at all. The martyr's sermon warns us that a martyrdom is never the design of man and that a Christian martyr is neither an accident nor the effect of man's will to become a saint. The hero has only to wait for the murderers to appear. The knights rush in and the murder takes place as a kind of ritual slaughter of an unresisting victim, a necessary act, not in itself exciting or significant.

The attempt to present in Thomas the martyr in will and deed with mind and heart purified to be made the instrument of that divine purpose is a bold one. There is a tint of professionalism about his sanctity; the note of self-complacency is always creeping into his self-conscious presentation of himself. He holds the pastoral commission and it is right that he should teach his folk. But his dramatic function comes to seem less to be a martyr or witness than to improve the occasion, to give an Addisonian demonstration of how a Christian can die. Thomas is indeed less a man than an embodied attitude. If martyrdom requires the martyr to have the right attitude on the part of great mass of humanity, the efficacy of martyrdom is lost; if it is not accepted by common men as 'the design of god, for His love of men to warn them and to lead them back to his ways'.

The chorus of the women of Canterbury is representative of mankind- a small folk who live among small things, type of the common man'. They, much against their will, and full of

inexplicable fear, initially are drawn to be witness to the martyrdom. They fear the involvement with the unknown, the uncontrollable that will render their ordered life into chaos. Their fear increases as tempters gather for a united attack on Thomas: ‘O Thomas archbishop, save us, save yourself that we may be saved. Destroy yourself and we are destroyed.’ They acknowledge that their spiritual indifference depends upon Thomas. In part 2 they admit that his sacrifice is necessary but they are very much ashamed of their own part in the murder and admit their responsibility for Thomas’s death. In the end of the play however, better understanding has come and they are fully cognisant of the significance of Beckett’s martyrdom. They admit that the sacrifice was made for them. On the plain of reality that the knights exist, martyrdom means ‘suicide while of unsound mind’. It goes to show that spiritual experience cannot be interpreted by mere logic and reason. The benefit of coming out of the martyrdom is spiritual and not political as the knights would make us believe.

A martyrdom would be useless if it does not serve to remind humanity of god’s love. It is the blood of martyrs that endows spiritual fertility in a spiritual wasteland. Thus the play instructs us in the meaning of martyrdom and is an extension of the liturgy, in that it invites us to celebrate the act of martyrdom as a sign of god’s grace, relevant to all sorts and conditions of men. As Wilson Knight remarks, ‘*Murder in the Cathedral*’ dramatizes Beckett as a type of Christian heroism conquering pride and attaining martyrdom’. However it is made clear that Beckett’s martyrdom is an art of atonement for the inadequacies of the world.

As a Drama of Temptation

The 1st tempter is a voice from Beckett’s past, a reminder of the gay days of his youth. He reminds Beckett of the delights of companionship with the king and of sensuous pleasure. Stephen Spender remarks the dramatic purpose of the 1st and 3rd tempters is not really to tempt since they offer Thomas choices of pleasure and political partisanship which he has already clearly rejected. Their purpose is to set before the audience images of Thomas’s past-the life of personal enjoyment, friendship with the king and temporal power. These tempters are ghosts from the past. The 2nd tempter offers Thomas a choice which he has already rejected. However this is a choice not just evocative of the past, it is the one that needs to be defined and explained in order that the spectator may clearly understand Thomas’s present position. It is the choice of doing material good in the temporal world, an action of which Thomas as a spiritual leader in command of temporal power might will undertake. The 2nd tempter asks him to become the chancellor again in order that he may save the people from misgovernment. Thomas has no difficulty in rejecting the part of the temptation which concerns covering himself in worldly glory. Yet there is a further temptation which involves him in exacter definition of his aim. It is temptation to use power in order to achieve good. ‘Temporal power to build a good world, to keep order as the world knows order’. Thomas rejects this on the ground that he has made a choice beyond that of doing good in the world through power. It is that of spiritual power that carries out the will of god. The 3rd tempter asks Thomas to ally himself with the English barons against the king. As a temptation, this is meaningless. If he were concerned with temporal power, Thomas would be on the side with the king against the barons.

Finally there is the 4th tempter- the only one who really tempts Thomas because he chooses what his own thoughts are, the purpose of the enduring crown to be won through martyrdom. Thomas recognizes this voice which is the echo of his own and knowing this he cries, 'can sinful pride be driven out only by more sinful? Can I neither act nor suffer without perdition.' The martyr may be acting out of pride and the desire of glory. Although glory is indeed the crown of martyrdom, for the martyr to be martyred, for, this reason corrupts his action and puts him on the level of those concerned with their own power and glory. This will of the individual has to be absorbed within the objective will, which is the love of god with such perfection that action becomes passive suffering subjectively motiveless. The 4th tempter having echoed and clarified for him Thomas's aspirations for the glory of martyrdom now echoes his rejection of his own self, regard his dedication to the aim of submerging every element of his own will within the will of god. The 4th tempter takes up indeed the very words that Thomas has himself spoken to the chorus.' You know and do not know what it is to act or suffer, you know and do not know that action is suffering and suffering is action'. This is a moment when Eliot merges his own poetry in what was for him the supreme moment of Dante 'in his will is our peace'.

As a Poetic Drama

T. S. Eliot's achievements in the field of poetry are remarkable. He has been attracted towards poetic drama by his belief that poetic drama has something potentially to offer to the play goes that prose drama cannot. The advantage of verse over prose has attracted T. S. Eliot from poetry towards drama. In poetic drama he could very well put his best, the poet as well as the dramatist –while in poetry the dramatic skill remain untouched and unrevealed. A dramatist poet could fuse together in a play, poetry and drama, illusion and reality, laughter and seriousness, images and symbols. He could render it more appealing than a prose play. Eliot therefore said, 'it seems to me that if we come from poets' learning to write plays than from skilful prose dramatists learning to write poetry'.

At the time of writing, '*Murder in the Cathedral*' Eliot's views was that the audience should be made aware that when they were seeing a verse play; but later he changed the opinion. According to Eliot, poetic drama had a richness in it and this was due to the presence of an 'under pattern' – a kind of doubleness in the action as if it took place on two planes at once. Poetic drama also had the ability to achieve a better concentration and unity because verse by its very nature gave richness, depth and unity to a play. The versification had to be a flexible or elastic kind that could be modulated to suit the different characters in different situations. The poetry had to be integrated to the drama and it had to be dramatically justified.

'*Murder in the Cathedral*' gratified Eliot's 10 years ambition. It is also a landmark in English dramatic history. It proved that English verse drama could still succeed and Eliot's younger contemporaries hastened to follow him. A number of verse plays came out in the later 50s though none of these has maintained itself as '*Murder in the Cathedral*' has done. His first play turned out to be Eliot's most enduring stage success. Eliot selected a historical subject with martyrdom as its theme and it enabled him to use verse freely and successfully. For the creation of a new poetic form. He turned far back to the ancient Greek dramatist and English

moralties of the medieval times. He purposely avoided the Shakespearean form. He is mainly indebted to Greek tragedy or the form of the play by the extensive use of the chorus. He models much of the versification upon 'Every Man' a medieval morality play.

Eliot developed a suitable verse for which was neither archaic nor complete of contemporary idiom. The verse form was such that it worked both ways; kept up historical illusion while bringing home the relevance of the theme to the contemporary situation. As Eliot himself said, the versification in the play is flexible, avoids Shakespearean overtone and has a natural style. It is suited to the emotions which are to be expressed and the character who expresses them. Nowhere in the play do we find any bit of versification which is not dramatically valid.

It is the power of the dramatic verse that gives the play its unique quality of unity and intensity. As a poetic drama, it deals not merely with the story of the murder of Thomas Beckett, not only with his martyrdom but with man's relationship to god. Such a fundamental aspect of human existence is fit for poetic treatment. Another important fact about poetic drama is that it deals with something of permanent relevance, in 'Murder in the Cathedral', the theme is of universal significance. The vocabulary, idiom and rhythm of the language are perfectly modulated to suit the occasion.

Poetic drama can suggest levels of reference beyond the immediate one of dramatic action, for poetry can easily live in the deep results of significance in myth and religion into drama. In 'Murder in the Cathedral', the essentially religious theme has been given a universal appeal and interest through the Greek and Christian myth that is provided as an under pattern. Eliot sees a parallel to the death of Beckett in the death of Oedipus and the death of Christ. There is a doubleness of action in 'Murder in the Cathedral', the simultaneous revelation of more than one plane of reality. It is not only the representation of martyrdom but also the spiritual progress of the chorus. The chorus supports the action and reflects in its emotion the significance of the action. According to Raymond Williams, they are the articulate voice of the body of the worshippers. It is in the chorus that we get the most interesting dramatic verse.

'Murder in the Cathedral' shows a path to poetic drama. The play in spite of its perfections, should be considered not 'as a drama to end all dramas but as one example of the art in our confusing times'. It should be regarded as 'employing only one of many possible strategies for making modern poetic drama'. Considering 'Murder in the Cathedral' as a modern poetic drama, Allardyce Nicoll says, Eliot's 'Murder in the Cathedral' forms a distinct milestone in the journey towards the resurrection of a modern poetic drama, since here an author regarded why many of the younger generation as their chief master turn to the theatre and sought to apply his characteristic style to its purpose. 'Murder in the Cathedral' is not a perfect example of the general and Eliot is aware of it. But the play derives its greatness from its dramatic verse. However Eliot has said 'the greatest drama is a poetic drama and dramatic defects can be compensated by poetic excellence.'

Beckett as a Tragic Hero

Eliot's Beckett has a little resemblance to an Aristotelian tragic hero. Beckett's character is not flawless in the beginning. But it becomes perfect in the end. The internal conflict in part 2 itself is external. The suffering of Beckett is expressed through the chorus. Moreover it is not a murder but an act of redemption. Beckett has not comparison with the Shakespearean heroes. Shakespeare makes them represent the greater glory of man whereas Eliot's Beckett represents the greater glory of god. So Beckett does not resist the murderess, he is humbly submissive accepting that. As in an existential drama he is presented with a situation in which he must make a choice. Beckett makes a deliberate choice- to be firm in affirming the rights of the church. It is the tragedy of a Christian who is crucified to atone for the sin of humanity. The play dramatizes Beckett as a type of Christian hero, conquering pride and attaining martyrdom.

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